

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**OF**

**PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**PROVIDED TO THE**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**CONCERNING PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**March 24, 2015**

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the Subcommittee, the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) thanks you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding the proposed legislation. The bills introduced are intended to make adjustments and corrections in existing programs and extend the expiration date on several other important programs. We support your effort to help the men and women that have honorably served their nation and are in the process of successfully transitioning back to the civilian world.

### **H.R. 456, the “Reducing Barriers for Veterans Education Act of 2015”**

PVA supports H.R. 456, the “Reducing Barriers for Veterans Education Act of 2015.”

This legislation will provide funds for veterans using the GI Bill who are required to pay an additional charge for application fees. Often the additional fees are not budgeted in a veteran’s college expenses. Some programs require additional fees that can amount to several hundred dollars, placing an unforeseen burden on the veteran before starting their college courses. This legislation will eliminate the financial barrier that some veterans face when pursuing educational programs that require additional application fees.

### **H.R. 473, the “Increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability to Veterans Act of 2015”**

PVA generally supports H.R. 473, the “Increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability to Veterans Act of 2015,” which would give the Secretary more leverage as he continues his campaign to improve the VA health care system. This legislation will allow the Secretary to reduce benefits of Senior Executive Employees that have been convicted of certain crimes. Section 3, the Reform of Performance Appraisal System for Senior Executive Service Employees is troublesome for our organization. This limits the recognition of employees that have contributed more than a position requires while maintaining a personal goal of improving service to veterans. The forced distribution of bonuses paid to senior employees, although intended to sharply limit the number of bonuses paid, can discourage those that are overachievers.

### **H.R. 474, the “Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2015”**

PVA supports H.R. 474, the “Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2015,” which would extend through FY2020 the VA’s homeless veterans’ reintegration programs. Many of the programs that have been successful components of the effort to eliminate homelessness among veterans will expire in FY 2015. These programs have provided job training, counseling, and placement services to homeless veterans to expedite their reintegration into the labor force. Veterans that

participate in these programs include: (1) homeless veterans, (2) veterans who are participating in the VA supported housing program which provides rental assistance through the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and (3) veterans who are transitioning from being incarcerated.

#### **H.R.475, the “GI Bill Processing Improvement Act of 2015”**

PVA supports H.R. 475, the “GI Bill Processing Improvement Act of 2015” which will make changes and improvements to the information technology system of the VA. Section 2 places an emphasis on the information technology solution for processing original and supplemental claims and requires electronic processing of the claims which will insure accuracy and eliminate delays in future claims.

#### **H.R.476, the “GI Bill Education Quality Enhancement Act of 2015”**

PVA supports H.R. 476, the “GI Bill Education Quality Enhancement Act of 2015.” This legislation will clarify the process of approving courses of education that are recognized for use by veterans using VA benefits. The legislation will allow state agencies to approve certain programs that meet criteria determined by VA to be a program which shall be approved for VA educational benefits. The state approving agency may qualify certain flight training programs as eligible for the Post 9/11 GI Bill since they are required in a flight training curriculum. The state approving agency may also approve flight training programs in an institution of higher learning in which flight training is required to earn the degree being pursued.

#### **H.R. 643, the “Veterans Education Survey Act of 2015”**

PVA supports H.R. 643, the “Veterans Education Survey Act of 2015.” This legislation directs the VA to enter into a contract with a non-government entity to conduct a survey of individuals who have used or are using their entitlement to educational assistance under the educational assistance programs administered by the VA.

### **H.R.1038, the “Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act”**

PVA supports H.R.1038, the “Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act.” This legislation requires VA to retain all records which document any reprimands or admonishment received by VA employees. These records must be retained as long as the employee is employed by VA. Retaining records of employee reprimands is critical to evaluating an employee’s personal performance and determining if that performance is part of a larger problem within a program of VA. This documentation is necessary for the Secretary to evaluate problems and make changes needed to correct ongoing problems in the VA.

### **H.R.1141, the “GI Bill Fairness Act of 2015”**

PVA supports H.R. 1141, the “GI Bill Fairness Act of 2015” which would include time spent receiving medical care from the Department of Defense as active duty time for the purpose of eligibility for Post 9/11 GI Bill. We have no doubt that this time should be considered active duty time toward qualifying for the Post 9/11 GI Bill. This legislation would be retroactive to the date of the enactment of the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

### **H.R. 1187, Legislation to Modify the Loan Limit of the VA Loan**

PVA supports H.R. 1187. This legislation makes adjustments in the maximum amount of the loan guaranteed under section 3710 of title 38, the VA Home Loan. Home prices vary from each region of the country, from each metropolitan community within a region, and from each neighborhood within a community. A fixed maximum limit on the VA loan amount that a veteran can borrow limits where the veteran can live. This legislation will give veterans who reside in high-cost areas where average home prices exceed the VA Home Loan maximum greater flexibility in the type and location of homes they can purchase using the VA Home Loan.

### **H.R. 1313, the “Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business Relief Act”**

PVA supports H.R. 1313, the “Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business Act.” This legislation will make changes in the law that certifies Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB) to help with the transition of that business when

the veteran passes away. Currently if the veteran business owner is rated less than 100% when passing away from a non-service connected illness or injury, the surviving spouse only has one year to transition the business out of SDVOSB status with VA. If the SDVOSB has contracts with any other federal agency, the business immediately loses its SDVOSB status upon the passing of the veteran and all business must stop. This legislation will allow the business to retain the SDVOSB status for three years upon the passing of the veteran to allow for a transition of the business. This three year period would apply to SDVOSB contracts with the VA and all federal agencies.

### **H.R. 1382, Legislation Addressing VA Procurement Contracts**

PVA supports proposed legislation to authorize the VA to award contracts for procurement of goods or services to businesses that employ veterans. Unfortunately, employing veterans is not a high priority for businesses. This is understandable since the goals of a business are to pay bills, pay employees, buy necessary capital equipment and supplies, and attempt to make profit. However, some businesses do make an effort to employ veterans and based on their experience hiring veterans, continue to employ veterans. Those businesses should be recognized, if not by all federal government procurement, at least by VA. Legislation to authorize VA to award contracts will not change the current pattern of awarding contracts to favored businesses. Among businesses that submit proposals and meet the requirements of the contract, the contract must be awarded to the business that demonstrates an effort and successfully employs veterans. Without Congressional oversight this requirement, if passed into law, risks becoming simply another policy that is overlooked by the VA in the procurement of goods and services.

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano and Members of this Subcommittee, PVA appreciates the opportunity to comment the bills being considered. We thank you for continuing the work in this Subcommittee to ensure that veterans have the best available programs, options, and opportunities as they transition to the civilian world.

**Information Required by Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives**

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding federal grants and contracts.

***Fiscal Year 2014***

No federal grants or contracts received.

***Fiscal Year 2013***

National Council on Disability — Contract for Services — \$35,000.

**Disclosure of Foreign Payments**

“Paralyzed Veterans of America is largely supported by donations from the general public. However, in some very rare cases we receive direct donations from foreign nationals. In addition, we receive funding from corporations and foundations which in some cases are U.S. subsidiaries of non-U.S. companies.”